

# Veterans

President Bush is firmly committed to honoring the veterans of our Nation's Armed Forces. Because of the President's leadership, the Department of Veterans Affairs is more responsive to veteran needs and has improved health care and claims processing times. President Bush's FY 2005 Budget reflects these goals.

Since 2001, President Bush has:

- Proposed record levels of support for America's veterans and increased VA healthcare funding by more than 40% – enabling a million more patients to receive treatment. These increases have enabled VA to focus on its core medical mission to provide high-quality health care to veterans with service-related disabilities, low incomes, and special healthcare needs;
- Twice signed legislation effectively providing “concurrent receipt” of both military retired pay and VA disability compensation for those military retirees most deserving—combat-injured and highly-disabled veterans—reversing a century-old law preventing concurrent receipt;
- Implemented changes to ensure that veterans receive timely medical care. By the end of the summer of 2004, the list of veterans waiting more than 6 months for medical care, which peaked at 300,000, will be essentially eliminated;
- Opened 194 new community-based clinics to be more responsive to veterans needs;
- Enrolled 2.5 million more veterans in VA healthcare services, increasing outpatient visits from 44 million to 54 million; and increasing the number of prescriptions filled from 86 million to 108 million;
- Saved veterans hundreds of dollars in drug costs last year by having non-VA prescriptions filled by the VA if they have been unable to see a VA doctor for more than 30 days;
- Improved coordination of medical care and other benefit programs between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs with the creation of the VA-DoD Joint Executive Council;
- Reduced by 30% the average time to process a veteran's disability claim, and this year VA expects to meet its goal of 100 days to process a claim;
- Reduced the inventory of disability claims by over 40%, from a peak of 432,000, and is approaching the VA goal of 250,000;
- Cut in half the number of out-standing disability claim cases over six months old;
- Enlarged the national cemetery system with the largest expansion since the Civil War in order to honor veterans with a hallowed, final resting place; and

- Expanded community grants to all 50 States and Washington, D.C., ensuring that for the first time in U.S. history homeless veterans have access to housing, healthcare, and shelter.

The President's FY 2005 Budget for veterans builds on the successes of the last three years. The Budget includes:

- \$29.5 billion for VA medical care to serve our Nation's veterans, an increase of \$1.2 billion from FY 2004;
- Realigning the Department's medical care infrastructure to ensure that facilities and services follow veterans – including spending almost \$1.5 billion in 2004 and 2005 as a first step to improve quality and access of care to all veterans;
- Ensuring that veterans' benefits are processed in a timely manner. In 2005, 2.7 million veterans will receive \$24.9 billion in tax-free disability benefits from VA – an increase in program funding of 50% from FY 2001; and
- Beginning to use electronic patient medical records that can be shared between the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs for seamless service to our Nation's veterans.

For Other Information About the President's Accomplishments and Proposals:

#### **FY 2005 Budget**

Department of Veterans Affairs: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/va.html>

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The White House: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/veterans/>